



Remembering Chalo

Belisario "Chalo" Natareno was born in Mixcolajá on February 28, 1974, to Onofre and Paula Natareno. The early years of his life, deep in the heart of the mountains of Quiche Department, were very difficult. His father was a cruel alcoholic. Poverty and war ravaged the countryside. Chalo remembered keeping a lookout for soldiers and hiding in the mountains for days at a time. On one occasion Chalo mentioned some of the wartime atrocities he witnessed, but it was clearly a subject he did not like thinking about.

Chalo was only able to go to school until second grade, when he had to lay aside academics and "take up the hoe" to help support his family. Nonetheless, Chalo did learn to read and continued to read whenever he had opportunity, mostly from the Bible. Through the witness of the Mennonite church, his mother and older sister became Christians, despite violent opposition from his father. But eventually even Chalo's father Onofre accepted Christ, and their home changed radically.

At the age of seventeen, Chalo was baptized into the church. In 1997, he "shacked up" with Alicia De Leon, but unlike many, they proceeded to get officially married in May of that year. This union produced four children: Lorena, Selvin, Arnold, and Leidy.

For the next number of years, Chalo was a regular in church, giving every appearance of being a solid, dedicated Christian. At the tender age of ten, his oldest daughter Lorena dedicated her life to Christ and joined the church. But shortly after, in 2007, Chalo suddenly disappeared from Mixcolajá and entered the United States illegally to find work.

As an industrious and motivated worker, Chalo soon had a job and began sending money home. His wife was then able to buy a parcel of land. But his daughter Lorena became discouraged and bitter, going to church less and less. And as the months passed, Chalo increasingly felt the pull of home. Although he attended a Mennonite church close to the dairy farm he was working at in Pennsylvania, the services were in English and very few people in the community

spoke Spanish. Chalo did learn some English, but he still felt lonely.

When Chalo calculated how much longer he would have to work to earn the money to build a good fence around his new land, he became even more discouraged. Finally he called Lamar Hursh, who had previously served in Mixcolajá, "Brother Lamar, I'm tired of this; I want to go home where I belong. Can you help me?"

Lamar gladly helped arrange for a passport and tickets for the flight home. Chalo arrived back in Mixcolajá on July 15, 2008. He later confessed that leaving his family to work in the States was one of the greatest errors he had made in his life, and he felt it was a major reason Lorena lost her way and left the church. He spent many hours in the following years praying earnestly for her return to Christ, and for his other children to accept Christ too. He had a burden for other lost souls in his community. Their home in the middle of the village of Santa Elena always had nephews, nieces, in-laws, neighbors, and friends visiting.

When church problems arose and many people left, Chalo was the only active male member for a time. He had all the responsibilities of preaching, teaching,



Belisario (Chalo) Natareno

and song leading. He became so discouraged about this that he prayed, “Lord, if no one else comes to help with the work soon, I’m just going to close the church doors.” Help did come shortly after, and services continued.

Sometime later, Nicholas Suarez and Justin Zimmerman were placed in Mixcolajá to help lead the church. Together, these three men served the church for five years. Chalo was commissioned as deacon on March 5, 2021. His daughter Lorena rededicated her life to Christ, and his older son Selvin and younger daughter Leidy also became Christians.

On Saturday, June 8th, Chalo was taken to the hospital in Xela (Quetzaltenango) as a mysterious paralysis shut down his limbs and made swallowing and talking impossible. A series of tests confirmed the diagnosis as Guillain-Barre syndrome, a condition in which the immune system attacks the nerves. Unfortunately, a week of treatment produced minimal improvement, and subsequent infections in the lungs and other organs eventually led to Chalo’s death on Monday, July 8, exactly one month after entering the hospital.

Although Chalo was unable to communicate verbally during his final month, it was clear that he had peace with God. Brother Nicholas administered the ordinance of anointing with oil on one of the last days Chalo was still conscious. God chose to call Chalo to his final rest rather than restore his physical health, at just fifty years old.

Chalo was small in stature but large in heart, and he had an outsized impact on his church and community. He would be the first to tell you that he had “played at Christianity” during a number of years. But eventually Chalo became a sold-out disciple of Christ and served in every capacity he could. In addition to



Carrying Chalo’s casket

being the spiritual leader of his home, he was a father figure to many fatherless children in the community, a trusted counselor and community leader, a very skilled block layer, a member of the MAM school committee, and president of the church school. He also worked part-time for Open Hands, overseeing six savings groups in the area.

In 2023, Chalo had the unique privilege of participating with three of his children in the Messengers of Mercy chorus. He immensely enjoyed singing and could generate astonishing volume for someone his size. His voice is missed in the Mixcolajá congregational singing. But we like to think that Chalo is now “tuning up” for that great chorus that the Apostle John shared about in Revelation 19. The church in Guatemala has lost an energetic worker, but *precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints* (Psalm 116:15).

A Special Event in Novillero

On June 2, people from various churches gathered to witness a special event and rejoice with Juanito Ovalle as he was reinstated as an active member in the church. The Steven Martin family from the States who had served in Novillero also came to support Juanito.

The service included a message by Jeremias Mendez, testimonies from brothers from San Cristóbal, and a reinstating ceremony led by Victor Ovalle.

Continue to pray for Juanito as he starts a new chapter in his life. He has struggled with drinking, and the journey forward won’t be without struggles. But we can do our part by remembering him in our prayers and sending him encouragement.

Also pray for his wife Olivia, who is not a member. Continue to pray for her that she would be willing to take the step.

Deacon Diego Tziquin,
Juanito Ovalle, Victor Ovalle



Youth Institute

June 25 was the start of the annual Guatemalan Youth Institute. A few arrived the day before to set up. There were few enough men that the womenfolk were recruited to help set up the tent poles. Then there were outside lights to string up, loudspeaker cables to run, tent curtains to hang, and lots of tables and benches to move.

Institute started on Tuesday at noon. After a quick introduction, we headed off for lunch. And while I'm on the topic, I must say thank you to all the cooks. There was a lot of food to make, and several cooks suffered from headaches from working all day in the kitchen. Thanks to each of you for your hard work!

After lunch Tuesday, Larry Martin shared a message on the importance of building your life out of lasting material instead of straw and rubble that will not survive. Later that evening, Wendell Diem shared a message on Joseph.

The next day we were blessed with a variety of topics: "Stewardship" by Nick Suarez, "Christian Courtship" by Joshua Martin, and "Liberalism or Legalism?" by Andrew Crider. We ended the day with a message from Jerlin López on Daniel.

Wednesday we had a time of prayer and sharing in groups in the afternoon, and afterward, a time of games that consisted of hanging onto your teammate's shoulders and running around trying to pop other people's balloons.

Larry had asked Dustin and me to be the bedtime police on Tuesday and Wednesday. Either we were lenient police, or people had their good behavior switched to the ON position. Whichever way it was,

everything worked out okay.

Thursday was the last day, and we started with a few songs and a meditation, followed by a talk by Isaías Muñoz on relating to unbelieving parents. After some preparation time, we then set off to a park in San Lucas, where we split into hiking groups and explored the trails.

The monotony of hiking was relieved by occasional oddities such as a terrifying swinging bridge, death-defying rope swings that launched you into empty space above yawning ravines, lookouts from which you could see considerable distances, and even a tunnel leading back to who-knows-where, which provided an excellent place to exercise your vocal cords.

The maps, unfortunately, were difficult to make heads or tails of, partly because we were unsure of where exactly our campsite was located on the map. Thankfully, everyone made it safely back, and we all reconvened for lunch.

An hour after lunch, we headed back to "The Farm," played a few volleyball games, and had supper. Byron de la Rosa then delivered the last message of the week, on Timothy. Many people left the same evening or early next morning, and as far as I know, were blessed with safe travels home.

I was blessed by these couple of days and look forward to returning next year, and I pray that the rest were likewise encouraged. Many thanks to each brother who shared and for each person who contributed to making this event possible.

Anson Crider

Recent Events

Work Project on Oratorio Clinic

A group of eleven Kleine Gemeinde volunteers from Belize worked from June 15-22 to replace the main clinic roof and add a nice porch roof. Now those waiting in line at the clinic will have a bit of protection from the elements.

Horizon Mennonite School Group

A group of eight students and four chaperones from the Horizon Mennonite School in Hagerstown, Maryland, visited and worked in Guatemala (mostly the Oratorio area) July 19-29th. They got a good introduction to Guatemalan culture during their short visit!



Horizon School Group

Staff News and Weddings

Welcome to **Carolina Strite**, who comes from South Carolina to serve in Santa Rosita. She is a member of the Barnwell Mennonite Church (South Atlantic Mennonite Conference).



Arbin + Joy Mux Wedding

On Friday, July 19, a wedding service was held at “The Farm” in Sumpango for Arbin Mux and Joy Zimmerman. Victor Ovalle presided and about 180 guests were present. The couple will be living in Mixcolajá, where Joy has been serving the last four-and-a-half years.



Current Needs

We thank the Lord for the people He has provided for the work and are requesting His direction for the following needs:

- **Houseparents** at mission headquarters are needed soon after the beginning of next year.
- **1-2 VS fellows** are needed for driving, maintenance, mechanics, and missionary support.
- **1-2 VS girls** are needed to help in domestic work and local outreach.
- **1-2 missionary families/couples** are needed to support local church efforts.

To volunteer or suggest someone, please get in touch with David Martin (davidmartin422@outlook.com) or Brian Yoder (yoder4@gmail.com).

Newsletter subscriptions and address changes can be requested at mam@christianlight.org. Visit our website at mennoniteairmissions.org to sign up for digital newsletters, or email your request to newsletter@mennoniteairmissions.org.

Domingo + Kimberly De Leon Wedding

On Friday, August 2, another wedding was held, this time in Mixcolajá. Brother Victor directed the service in which brother Domingo De Leon (of Mixcolajá) and sister Kimberly López Benito (of San Cristóbal) were united before God and about 160 witnesses. They will be residing in Santa Elena and attending the church in Mixcolajá.



Prayer and Praise Items

- Praise God for several recent Christian marriages in Guatemala!
 - Pray for the young people of Guatemala, that they would have a desire for spiritual wholeness and strength to resist the world’s temptations.
 - Pray for Victor Ovalle’s health.
 - Pray for the needed funding to continue the work, as finances were tight over the summer.
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